For Internal Circulation Only

Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore Alumni (BPCA) E-Bulletin

Sep – Dec 2024

In a flash, another year has ended, and a new year is here. We would like to congratulate all students on completing their courses last year and look forward to journeying with them as they embark on the next phase of their Dhamma learning journey.

In this issue are updates on the events held from Sep to Dec 2024 with the following highlights:

- Diploma in Buddhism Course Previews
- Introduction to Buddhism (Chinese)
- China Silk Road and Beijing travel log
- Temple tour for 2024/2025 Diploma in Buddhism classes
- Annual Temple Spring Cleaning @MV

Stay connected with us by updating us on your contact details. Look out for our emails for this upcoming one-time exercise.

We would also like to invite you to contribute an article to the e-Bulletin or recommend your BPC alumni friend who may have something to share. For any enquiries on this contribution, please drop Sister Tyy Yn an email at tyyynquek@gmail.com.

May all be well, happy and peaceful!

The Editorial Team
BPCA Alumni Committee
30 Jalan Eunos, Singapore 419495

Diploma in Buddhism Course Previews

14 Sep & 21 Sep 2024

Diploma in Buddhism Course Previews were held on 14 Sep in Mangala Vihara (Buddhist) Temple and 21 Sep in Poh Ming Tse Temple.

Besides providing details on the subjects, Diploma and Degree students also shared their Dhamma learning journeys to encourage the attendees to embark on their academic learning journeys to learn the Dhamma in a more structured manner and apply the teachings in their daily lives.

Introduction to Buddhism (Chinese)

18 Sep to 9 Nov 2024

新加坡佛教与巴利文学院举办

2024佛学简介

基本佛学介绍

由新加坡佛教与巴利文学院讲师授课

More than 20 students attended the full course!

Silk Road and Beijing Trip

- Travel Log

31 Oct to 11 Nov 2024

By Sis Poh Neo

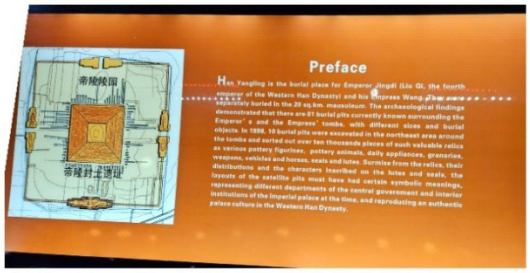
Photo credits: Bhante M Suneetha, Sis Jean Lau and all tour group members

Day 1

Our Silk Road trip started with the assembly of fifteen of us, including Bhante Suneetha and our Ik Chin guide, Jin Dao, at Changi Airport T1. The overnight flight to Xi'an via Beijing was smooth, allowing us to catch up on our sleep.

Day 2

Our tour of Xi'an began in the afternoon with a visit to the royal mausoleum of the Western Han Emperor, Jindi, and his empress. It was mostly intact, thus, allowing us to have a glimpse of the burial customs and civilization of the Han period.



In the evening, we walked along parts of Xi’an’s ancient city wall. On my past visit, I saw the wall during the day. Now, with the evening lighting, I saw the city wall and its surroundings from a different perspective.

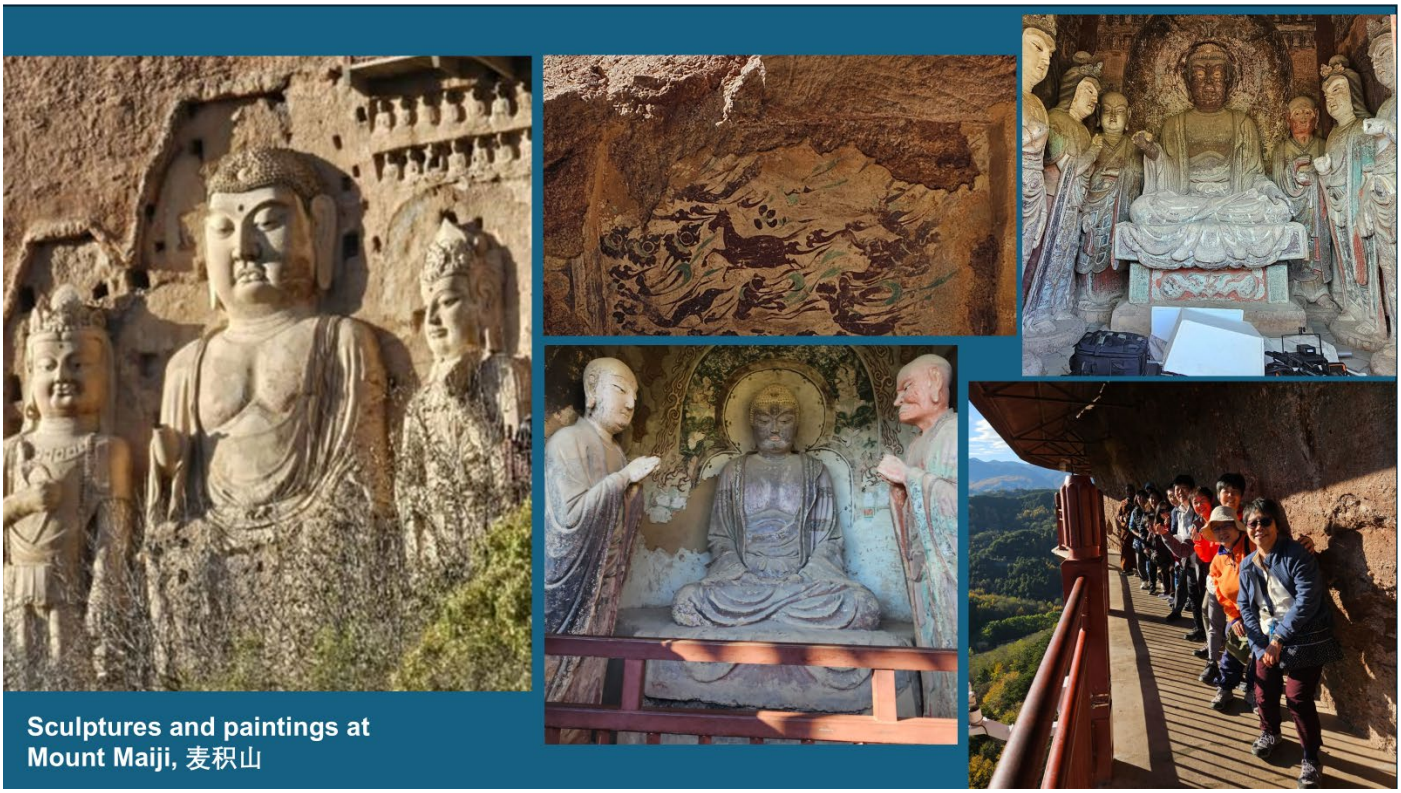
Photo Collage: Sis Jean Lau

Day 3 & 4

Our journey that covered the entire length of Gansu Province, which played a very important part in the ancient Silk Route, began in Tianshui. Coming into Tianshui means visiting Mount Maiji (麦积山) which is also known as the Museum of Statues. There are nearly 200 caves with more than 7,000 Buddha statues and wall carvings.

What made the walk up to these caves challenging was that the mountain slope was almost perpendicular to the ground. When I first saw the mountain from afar, with stairs stacked and hammered onto the face of the mountain, my first reaction was: I AM NOT GOING TO CLIMB THAT! However, drawn by the beauty of the artwork created by skilled craftsmen from the past, most of us made our way to the highest level and came down to ground level in one piece.

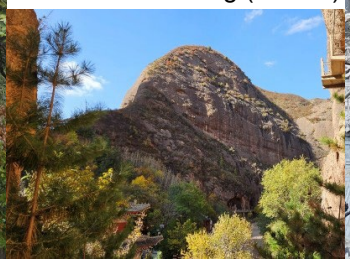
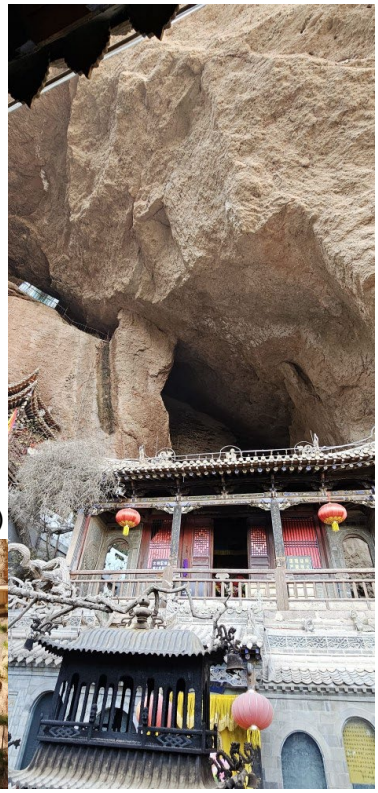
Photo Credit: Bhante Suneetha



Sculptures and paintings at Mount Maiji, 麦积山

We covered more thousand-year-old caves and grottoes over the next two days like the Lashao Monastery (拉梢寺) and the Shui Lian Dong (水帘洞) on the way to Lanzhou.

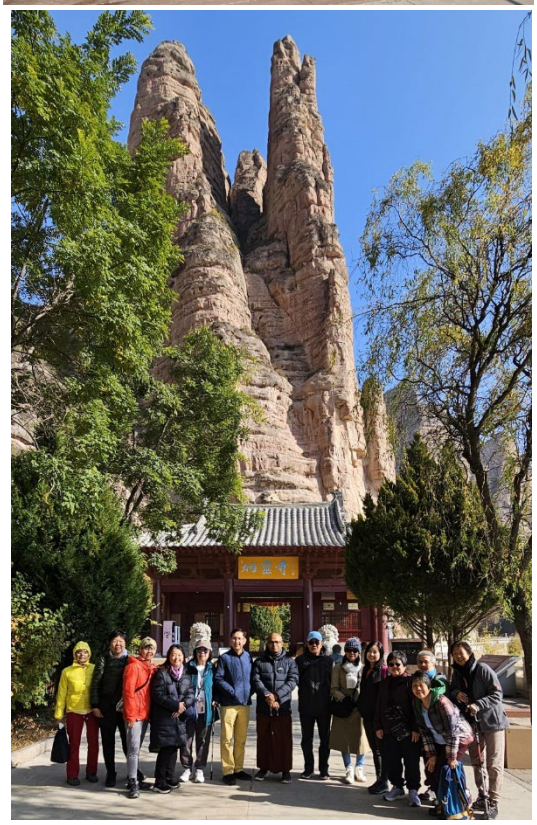
Open-air cliffside relief sculptures
露天摩崖浮雕造像

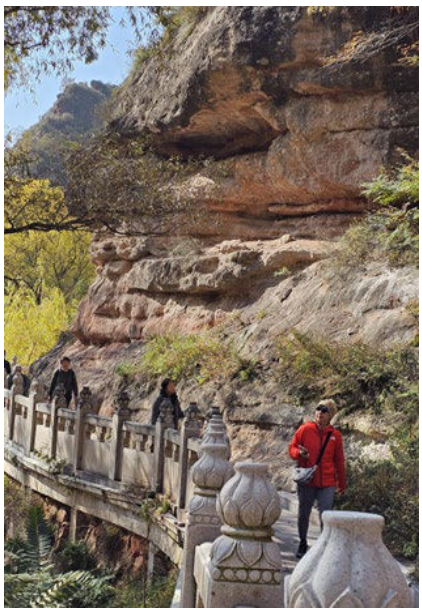
Shui Lian Dong (水帘洞)



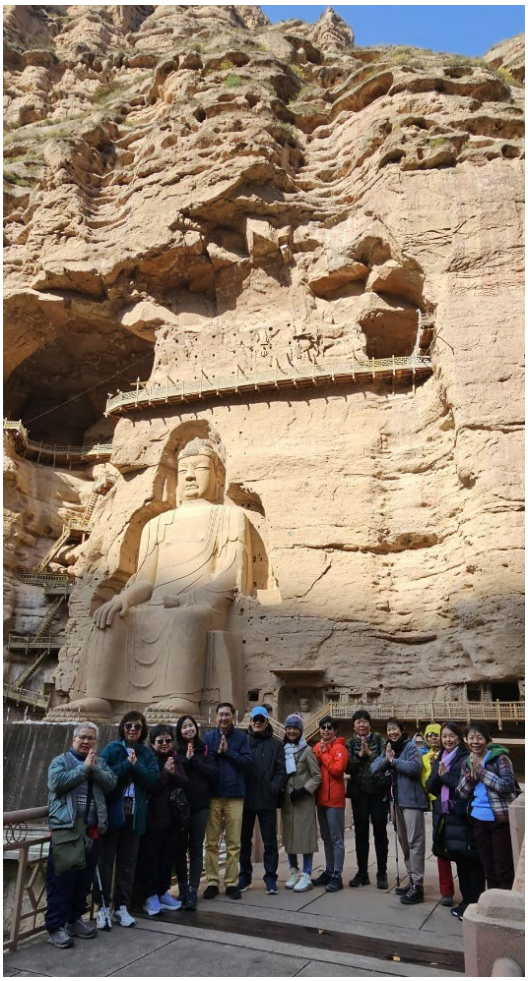
On the way to Bingling Temple Grotto (炳灵寺石窟), our guide took pains to explain that the Yellow River is not always yellow. Usually in the drier season like November, the river flows with less load and the water is clearer. Our first sight of a blue “Yellow River” was in Lanzhou.

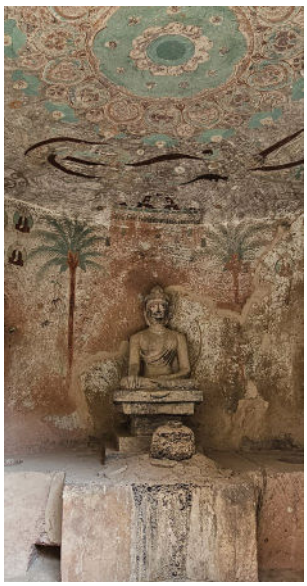
To visit the Bingling Temple Grottoes (炳灵寺石窟), we took a scenic boat ride into a canyon along the Yellow River.

The path from the jetty to the Bingling Temple Grottoes was well-paved, with trees lined up on both sides. Together with the cool sunny morning, our trip to the grotto was literally “a walk in the park” with little climbing to do.









Day 5

In Wuwei, we visited the temple and pagoda of Kumarajiva (344A.D. – 413A.D.), an eminent monk from Kucha who translated the Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese. It is believed that his remains are kept in this temple grounds.

Kumarajiva Temple and Pagoda (鸠摩罗什寺)

Photo Collage: Sis Jean Lau

The Big Buddha Temple (大佛寺) built in 1098 C.E., also in Wuwei, contained a well-preserved reclining Buddha image, the largest in China.

Photo Collage: Sis Jean Lau

Danxia National Geological Park (张掖丹霞地质公园) was the last place we visited before we settled down for the night in Zhangye. Its rolling landscape with layers of coloured rocks of red, green, grey, orange, yellow and brown was like kueh lapis, making it a great site for photography.

Photo Credit: Bhante Suneetha

Day 6

We had only one place to visit on this day and that was the Jiayu Fort or Jiayuguan (嘉峪关城楼**)**, which was an important outpost for the Ming Dynasty. However, this place, being an important part of the Silk Route, had already been in use for more than 2,000 years by tradesmen with their caravans of camels, pilgrims and others for various purposes.

Photo Collages: Sis Jean Lau

Day 7

We started the morning with a visit to the Yulin Grottoes (榆林窟) in Guazhou, also known as the Thousand Buddha Valley. Chiselling works of the area began in the Northern Wei Period and were subsequently added by rulers of various dynasties like Tang, Song and Yuan. Thanks to these Buddhist patrons and their subjects, we had this opportunity to admire the

beautiful artwork of skilled craftsmen from aeons ago. Unfortunately, photography was not allowed in the caves.

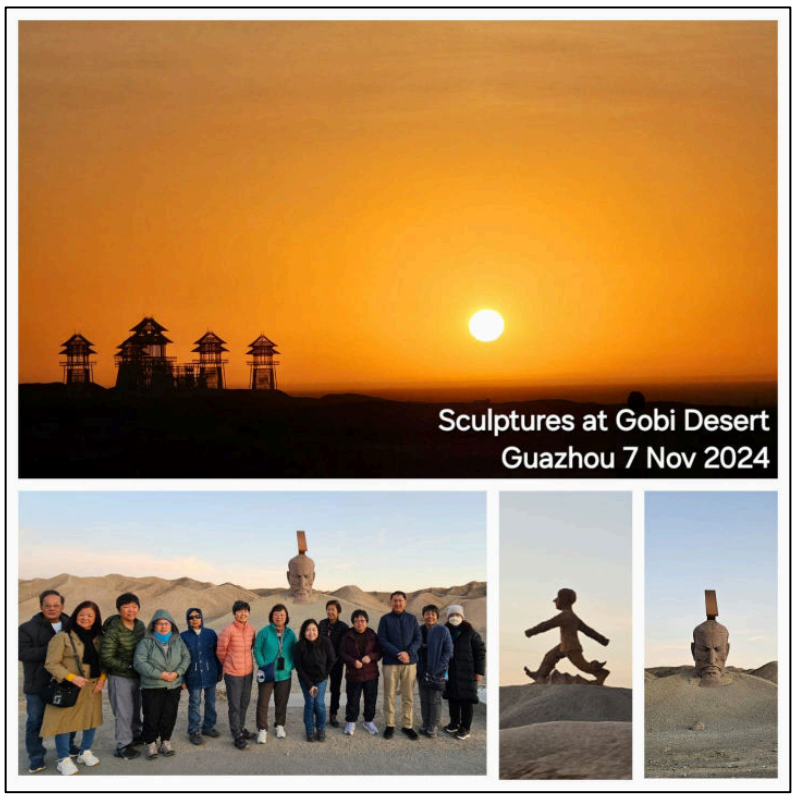


Photo Collage: Sis Jean Lau

On the way there, we were gifted with magnificent views in the Gobi Desert.

Our very own hiking man Guazhou arts corridor, courtesy of Sis Swee Cher.

We spent the rest of the afternoon at the Dunhuang Museum and camel riding at the Echoing Sand Dunes (鸣沙山).

Photo Collage: Sis Jean Lau

Day 8

In the morning, we visited **Leiyin Monastery** (雷音寺). It was the place where eminent monks from the Central Plains who went to the western regions to seek the Dhamma stayed. They included Venerables Dharmaraka, Fa Xian, Kumarajiva and Xuan Zang.

Photo Collage: Sis Jean Lau

In the afternoon, we visited the **Mogao Grottoes (**莫高窟**)**, also known as “1,000 Buddha Caves” – the magnificent treasure trove of Buddhist art. Unfortunately, photography was not allowed in the caves too.

We were very fortunate to have Sister Lay Kieng with us on this trip. She is like a walking Buddhist History textbook! While our guides Larry and Jesse gave us outlines of the places we visited, she filled in the spaces between these outlines!

Photo Collage: Sis Jean Lau

Day 9

In the morning, in Xi’an, our first stop was a visit to the Terracotta Warriors (兵马俑**)**. The clay figures were an awesome sight to behold. In his lifetime, Qin Shi Huang unified China. In death, his life-size “immortalised” army and war horses in battle formation, seemed to stand ready, at his command, to expand his empire further.

The Big Goose Pagoda (大雁塔) is another must-visit sight for Buddhists for it housed over 600 sets of Buddhist scriptures brought back from China by Venerable Xuan Zang. The pagoda has been restored several times over the last 1200 years. Today, it is tilting slightly to the right.

Photo Collages: Sis Jean Lau

A bonus for us was a visit to the Xiaoyan Pagoda (Small Wild Goose Pagoda) (小雁塔)。 Though it is shorter than its larger counterpart, the Big Goose Pagoda, it boasts more floors. It was also primarily constructed to house the sacred Buddhist scriptures brought to China by Venerable Xuan Zang.

Day 10

Having flown in from Xi'an, we spent the afternoon in Beijing walking the grounds of the Forbidden City. The halls and rooms were all fenced up and mostly in darkness to protect the artifacts in them.

The attraction here was looking at people dressed elaborately in Manchu costumes walking about or with their photographers in tow to pick the best spot to take their photographs.

Photo Collage: Sis Jean Lau

Then it was a long walk to Wangfujin Shopping District. Even though we were given about one hour to shop, many of us preferred to sit down to have a long sip of our favourite cuppa and a snack because we covered more than 16,000 steps that day - my watch told me that!

The big drama occurred when we went to check in at the Air China counter at about 9.30 p.m. We were told that our 12.35 a.m. flight had been cancelled. At that time, there were eleven of us left; three stayed behind and one took the next immediate flight available. Jin Dao and our Beijing guide, Darren, went into Operation Mode immediately. Within a short period of time, arrangement was made for us to stay the night at a hotel nearby. Jin Dao arranged with Air China to put us on the morning SIA flight.

Darren went to procure three taxis to ferry us to the hotel and he also stayed the night at the same hotel to see us off again the next morning. The most beautiful part about this drama was that even though we were all tired, no complaints or grumblings were heard and no tempers flared. Instead, we were grateful that these two young men were there to see us home safely. My take is this:
“Everything happens for a reason”.

Temple Tour

- for 2024/2025 Diploma in Buddhism Classes 24 Nov 2024

By Sis Lee Lui Foon, Sandra

Exploring Serenity: A Learning Journey to Three Buddhist Temples in Singapore

Introduction

Singapore is a melting pot of cultures and religions, including the different traditions of Buddhism. As part of our Diploma in Buddhism course, we visited three iconic Buddhist temples: **Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery**, **Burmese Buddhist Temple**, and **Amitabha Buddhist Centre**. Each temple offered a unique glimpse into the Buddha's teachings as well as Buddhist architecture and cultural heritage, leaving us deeply inspired and enlightened.

Some snapshots before we set off...

Teacher Jebsons reminded us of the Buddhist ethics to observe in the temples before setting off.

Our homework during the temple visit.

1. Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery

Our first stop was the Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery, the oldest Buddhist temple in Singapore. Built in 1902, this monastery is a testament to traditional Chinese temple architecture.

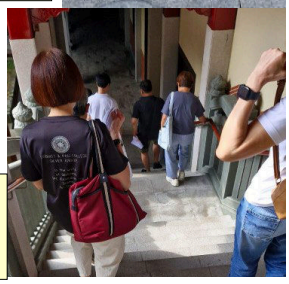
Calligraphy by ex-President Mr Ong Teng Cheong

Inside the Mahavira Hall are Buddhas of the three worlds.

The pathway is laid with lotus motif tiles.

Chinese influence found in the temple. Can you guess their significance?

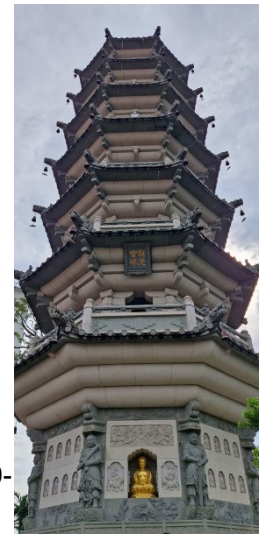
The location map which shows the Cong Lin architecture layout of the Monastery.



Recommended to wear comfortable shoes

- **What We learned:**
  We were amazed by the intricate carvings and serene gardens surrounding the temple. The guided tour introduced us to the famous Cong Lin architecture layout of the Shuang Lin Monastery which is modelled after Xichan Monastery, a famous temple in southern China. We also learned about the temple's restoration efforts, which highlighted the importance of preserving heritage sites.

- **Memorable moment:**
  Standing under the towering seven-story pagoda and learning about its symbolism - a representation of the path to enlightenment, was awe-inspiring.



The seven-storey pagoda, a replica of the 800-year-old Shanfeng temple pagoda in Fujian.

2. Burmese Buddhist Temple - Maha Sasanarami Burmese Temple
Our next destination was the Burmese Buddhist Temple, which houses the largest pure marble Buddha statue outside Myanmar. The 3.3 metre high Buddha statue was carved from a 10 tonne marble block found near Mandalay, Burma in 1915 in Sagyin Hill.

The temple exudes simplicity and elegance, reflecting traditional Burmese culture.

3.3 metre high Buddha statue carved from a10-tonne marble block.

Buddha statue at Level 3, with Abhaya mudra (hand gesture depicting Fearlessness).

- **What We learned:**
  We discovered the temple's role in fostering spiritual growth and its focus on mindfulness and loving-kindness. On Level 3, The Eight Glorious Victories of the Buddha were painted on the ceiling, symbolizing the significant episodes in the Buddha's life where he overcame challenges and adversities, ultimately reinforcing his path to enlightenment. These stories illustrated the triumph of wisdom, compassion, and spiritual resolve over ignorance, fear, and negative forces. Each victory carries profound spiritual meaning and serves as a lesson for practitioners.

- **Memorable moment:**
  There were many Myanmar nationals at the temple participating in a mindfulness session in the quiet hall. For them, the Burmese Buddhist Temple is more than a place of worship - it is a connection to their homeland. The temple reflects Burmese culture, architecture, and traditions, offering a familiar and comforting environment far from home.

3. Amitabha Buddhist Centre

The final stop was the Amitabha Buddhist Centre, known for its vibrant and colorful Tibetan-inspired architecture.

This centre actively serves as a hub for the study and practice of *Mahāyana* Buddhism based on the Gelug Tradition of the Tibetan master, Lama Tsong Khapa. Amitabha Buddhist Centre has been established as a non-profit Buddhist organisation in Singapore since 1989. They are associated with Foundation for the Preservation of the *Mahāyana* Tradition.

Prayer wheels adorn the entrance on both sides

- **What We learned:**
  The **35 Buddhas Practice** at the Amitabha Buddhist Centre offers a powerful avenue for repentance and spiritual renewal. The tantric murals on the walls are rich with spiritual symbolism and teachings. They serve as visual gateways into Vajrayana practices, inspiring practitioners to deepen their understanding of the Dhamma and their connection to enlightened qualities.

- **Memorable moment:**
  Seeing the intricately designed prayer wheels, we circumambulated the wheel clockwise while turning it with our hands. Its spiritual significance is its connection to the mantra of Chenrezig which embodies the universal wish for all beings to be free from suffering and generates immense positive energy.

The prayer wheel is notably massive, designed to house millions of mantras. Visitors are welcome to participate in spinning the wheel, offering an inclusive way to engage with the Dhamma.

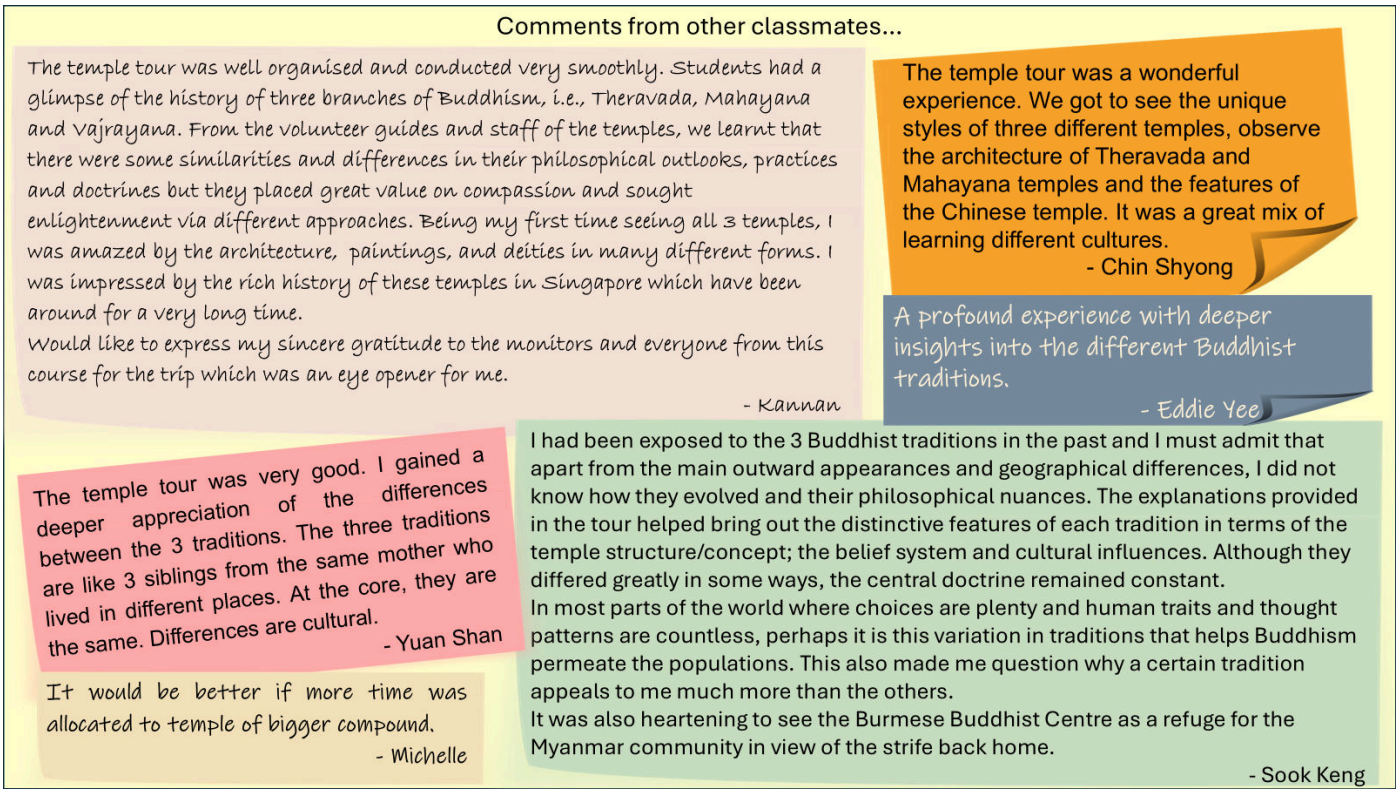
Group photo with the spectacular life-sized statue of Thousand-Arm Chenrezig, Avalokiteshvara.

Conclusion

This journey taught us more than just facts about Buddhism; it deepened our appreciation of the diversity within Buddhist practices and their influence on Singapore's cultural landscape.

Our visit to Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery, Burmese Buddhist Temple, and Amitabha Buddhist Centre was more than just a learning journey; it was a spiritual awakening. The lessons of mindfulness, compassion, and heritage preservation will remain with us long after the trip. We encourage everyone to take time to explore these sanctuaries of peace and wisdom right here in Singapore.

On behalf of all the Diploma students of 2024/2025, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Teacher Jebsons and his team for organising the Temple Visit. The Temple Visit was a success - the experience definitely enriched our knowledge.


Comments from other classmates...
The temple tour was well organised and conducted very smoothly. Students had a glimpse of the history of three branches of Buddhism, i.e., Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. From the volunteer guides and staff of the temples, we learnt that there were some similarities and differences in their philosophical outlooks, practices and doctrines but they placed great value on compassion and sought enlightenment via different approaches. Being my first time seeing all 3 temples, I was amazed by the architecture, paintings, and deities in many different forms. I was impressed by the rich history of these temples in Singapore which have been around for a very long time.
Would like to express my sincere gratitude to the monitors and everyone from this course for the trip which was an eye opener for me.
- Kannan
The temple tour was a wonderful experience. We got to see the unique styles of three different temples, observe the architecture of Theravada and Mahayana temples and the features of the Chinese temple. It was a great mix of learning different cultures.
- Chin Shyong
A profound experience with deeper insights into the different Buddhist traditions.
- Eddie Yee
The temple tour was very good. I gained a deeper appreciation of the differences between the 3 traditions. The three traditions are like 3 siblings from the same mother who lived in different places. At the core, they are the same. Differences are cultural.
- Yuan Shan
I had been exposed to the 3 Buddhist traditions in the past and I must admit that apart from the main outward appearances and geographical differences, I did not know how they evolved and their philosophical nuances. The explanations provided in the tour helped bring out the distinctive features of each tradition in terms of the temple structure/concept; the belief system and cultural influences. Although they differed greatly in some ways, the central doctrine remained constant.
In most parts of the world where choices are plenty and human traits and thought patterns are countless, perhaps it is this variation in traditions that helps Buddhism permeate the populations. This also made me question why a certain tradition appeals to me much more than the others.
It was also heartening to see the Burmese Buddhist Centre as a refuge for the Myanmar community in view of the strife back home.
- Sook Keng
It would be better if more time was allocated to temple of bigger compound.
- Michelle

Group photo with Bhante Seelananda after his address and a blessing ceremony.

Annual Temple Spring Cleaning @MV

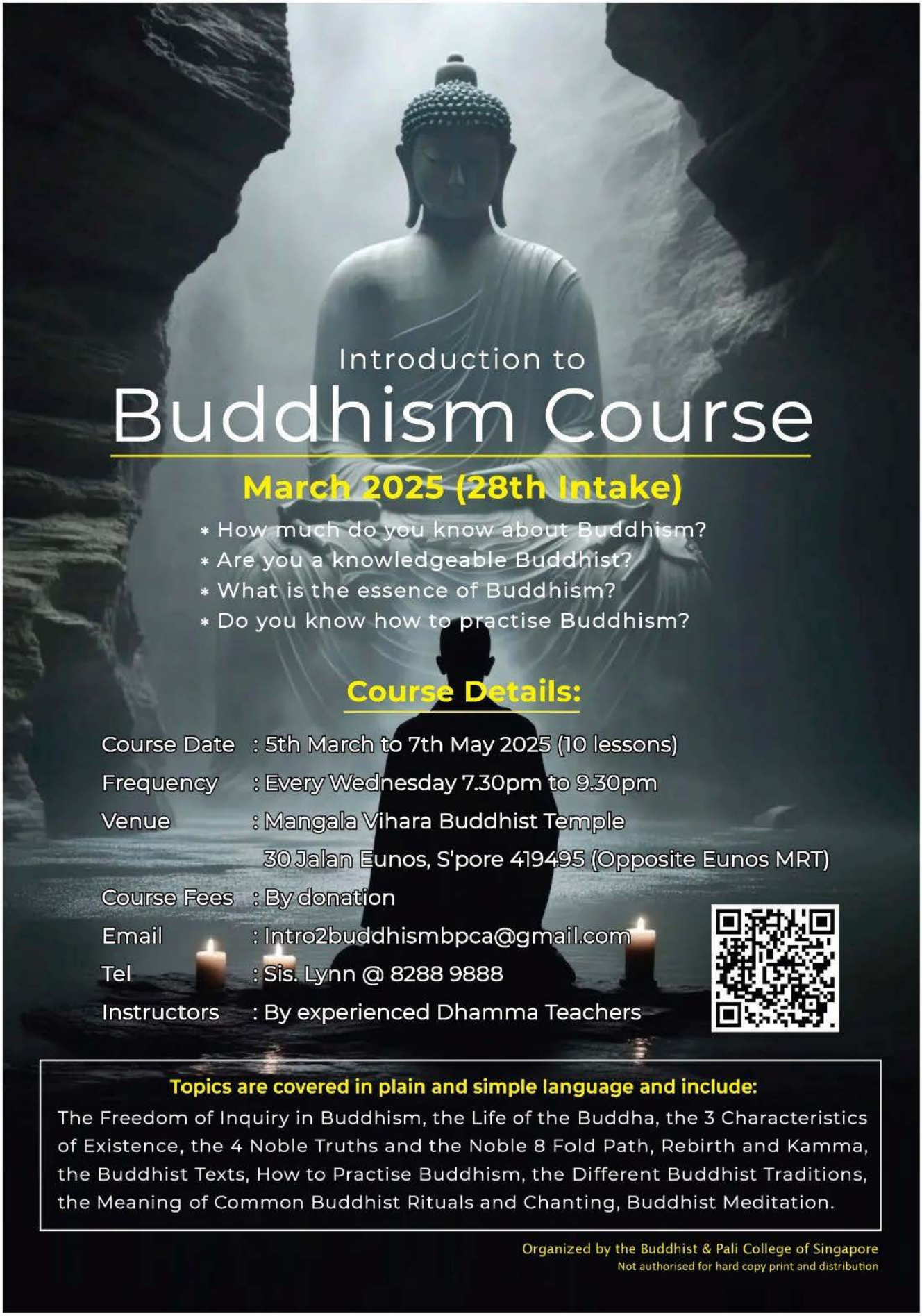
22 Dec 2024

BPC students of different levels came together to participate in this annual spring cleaning @MV, together with other groups in MV.

Besides practising dana (generosity) by offering their time and effort, it is also an expression of their appreciation for the kind offering of venues for the BPC courses by MV.

Areas covered: Chew Quee Neo Hall, BPC Office, the staircases, and Level 2 toilets.

Upcoming Courses


Introduction to
Buddhism Course
March 2025 (28th Intake)
* How much do you know about Buddhism?
* Are you a knowledgeable Buddhist?
* What is the essence of Buddhism?
* Do you know how to practise Buddhism?
Course Details:
Course Date : 5th March to 7th May 2025 (10 lessons)
Frequency : Every Wednesday 7.30pm to 9.30pm
Venue : Mangala Vihara Buddhist Temple
30 Jalan Eunos, S'pore 419495 (Opposite Eunos MRT)
Course Fees : By donation
Email : Intro2buddhismbpca@gmail.com
Tel : Sis. Lynn @ 8288 9888
Instructors : By experienced Dhamma Teachers
Topics are covered in plain and simple language and include:
The Freedom of Inquiry in Buddhism, the Life of the Buddha, the 3 Characteristics of Existence, the 4 Noble Truths and the Noble 8 Fold Path, Rebirth and Kamma, the Buddhist Texts, How to Practise Buddhism, the Different Buddhist Traditions, the Meaning of Common Buddhist Rituals and Chanting, Buddhist Meditation.
Organized by the Buddhist & Pali College of Singapore
Not authorised for hard copy print and distribution

Upcoming Courses

School Calendar

Class Commencement Date:	
New Diploma Class @Mangala Vihara (MV):	6 October 2024 @ 2.00pm
New Diploma Class @Poh Ming Tse (PMT):	8 October 2024 @ 7.30pm
New Diploma Class in **Chinese**:	5 January 2025
Degree Classes:	5 January 2025
Holidays:	
Year End break for **Diploma Classes**:	**25 Nov 2024 to 4 Jan 2025**
Chinese New Year (*29 to 30 Jan 2025*):	25 Jan to 8 February 2025
Good Friday (Diploma-PMT):	18 April 2025 (Friday)
Labour Day:	1 May 2025 (Thursday)
Vesak Day (*12 May 2025*):	6 May to 19 May 2025
Study Leave/Combined Revision:	
Diploma *Combined Revision* (English):	7 September 2025 (tbc)
Diploma *Study Leave* (English & Chinese):	9 September 2025
Degree *Study Leave*:	12 October 2025
Examination (*to be confirmed*):	
Diploma (English & Chinese):	18 to 20 October 2025 (tbc)
Degree:	1st two weeks of December 2025

Other Events and Courses

- 9 Feb: Chinese New Year Tea Party for all students

- 5 Mar to 7 May: Introduction to Buddhism (English)
- 5 Mar to 23 Apr: Introduction to Buddhism (Chinese)
- 16 Mar: Temple Tour for Diploma in Buddhism (Chinese) Class

- 7 Jun: Founders' Memorial Day